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Nesting Sites of the Desert Sparrow

BY FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY

THE naturalist working in the arid plains of the southwest finds his days so enlivened by the bright cheery song of *Amphispiza b. deserticola* that he becomes greatly attached to the companionable little songster and comes to associate him only with sunshine and happy good cheer. But for all his merry tunes poor *Amphispiza* has anxieties and tragedies all his own.

One June morning in New Mexico as I was going thru a grove of small round junipers, with spirits lifted by the bright song from the top of one of the trees, my steps were arrested and I gazed with dismay upon a beautiful little nest rudely torn from its place in the juniper, and the ground below strewn with feathers of the brooding mother bird. The horrid tragedy was probably no older than the night for the wind had not had time to blow away the feathers, and tracks tho blurred by the night's rain were fresh enough to fix the blame upon the marauder—a coyote or lynx. Was the songster to whom I had been listening, from the neighboring juniper top still hopefully calling for his poor dead mate? Or—with the philosophy that comes so quickly to the short-lived little beings whose emotions are compressed into hours—was he calling for another mate to help make a home in the desert?

A few days afterward we got hint of an arrested *Amphispiza* tragedy. Close to camp we discovered a nest in a low tree cactus and on examination found that one side was torn out and that there was only one nestling left. The brooding



NEST OF DESERT SPARROW

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mother, as if fearing to lose her last young one, with beautiful courage sat so close that we could hardly get sight of it—once actually letting me come up within arm's length of her. This trouble had come upon her in a tree cactus where cactus wrens find safety for their broods, and which was certainly much better than a juniper to build in, but in her case perhaps the nest was too close to the ground.

Another nest—the one shown in the picture—was probably too low also, but it was one of the best protected from above that we saw during the season, for it was wedged down in a yucca among whose slender needle-like leaves were woven the thorny stems of a catsclaw. It contained three eggs, and in the sun we noted that they looked pinkish instead of "plain greenish or bluish white." While we were taking the liberty of photographing the nest, both parents made a circle of the bushes, anxiously inspecting us, but as soon as we had withdrawn, charming little creatures that they are, one of them quickly flew over to the catsclaw beside the yucca—its crown slightly raised, its white head stripes and black throat showing handsomely, while its black tail was twitching nervously—and after looking around alertly for a moment and seeing no danger, ran down a branch of the catsclaw to the nest. We could not wait to make sure of the end of the story but went away hopeful of good fortune for the winning pair that seemed to us to have made such a wise choice for their home.

Washington, D. C.

About Collecting Chests

BY FRANK STEPHENS

ONE of the earliest problems that the field collector encounters is that of making a convenient collecting chest. Having had a wide experience in that line during the last thirty years I may be able to give others some hints on this subject. It is not possible to make a chest that is just the thing for all classes of work and one must compromise to some extent.

A dozen years ago I found that I must have a new chest. I wanted one to carry in a wagon, and I expected to pack it occasionally over rough mountain trails, tho I have really packed it but little. I wanted to use it for drying and storing mammals as well as birds; I wanted to carry my tools and notebooks in it; and I wanted a table. I built a chest that has filled all these requirements fairly well and when I build a new one it will be on the same plan. Its principal fault is that it is rather small for general work and yet is rather large for packing on a horse. For a trip lasting more than two or three weeks provision must be made for storing skins elsewhere, but as the surplus skins will be nearly or quite dry a plain box answers all supplemental purposes.

For material I used sugar pine, selecting clear soft boards, took them to the mill and had them dressed to order. In building another chest I would use the same material, except for the front, back and bottom sides where I would prefer whitewood or poplar dressed to half an inch or a little thinner. The ends of the chest, the ends of the trays, and the lid are of inch material surfaced on both sides to about seven-eighths of an inch in thickness. The remainder of the lumber was split and surfaced on both sides, the split being a trifle one side of the middle, the thicker boards being used for the sides of the chest and the thinner ones for the bottoms of the trays.